

The Hospital World.

METROPOLITAN ASYLUMS' BOARD—THE AMBULANCE SERVICE.

How many of those who pass up and down the Thames realize that the boats moored close to the shore at the South Wharf, Rotherhithe, and which may be distinguished by their black and yellow funnels, are part of the marvellous machinery of the Metropolitan Asylums' Board for dealing with infectious disease, but it is even so. On these boats, the Maltese Cross, the Geneva Cross, the Albert Victor, and the White Cross, there is every arrangement for the reception of over 100 small-pox patients, and everything is kept in readiness, so that if an influx of patients were notified from the head quarters in Norfolk Street, in an hour or two the requisite number of bunks would be made up, the nurses would be at their posts, and the boat or boats in full working order. The patients are usually not kept on these boats, but conveyed down the river some twenty miles to the ships which are maintained by the Board for the reception of small-pox patients. In case, however, that for any reason it is inadvisable or impossible for the boats to proceed down the river, every arrangement is made for the care of the patients upon them, tiny cabins are fitted up for use of the nurses. Sometimes the boats are fog-bound, occasionally the river is frozen, but after all, it does not much matter, for at the South Wharf Hospital the patients will receive every care and attention.

The Hospital, itself, is not designed for the reception of a large number of smallpox patients, it would not be advisable in so populous a neighbourhood, but it is arranged for the temporary reception of cases with the completeness which characterises the work of the Asylums Board. On the shore is a small hospital, enclosed in a garden, gay with gladioli and other flowers. This hospital consists of an administrative block, in which are the Matron's quarters, and, as well, those of the nursing and domestic staff, a dispensary, linen, crockery, and dry goods stores, a work-room, bath-rooms, etc. Sitting with the Matron, Miss Whitlock, in her cosy sitting-room, it was difficult to imagine that one was not miles away in the country. Quiet reigned supreme, not a sound but the occasional twittering of a bird was to be heard, the silence was, to a Londoner, delightful, and yet within a few hundred yards the streets were teeming with the typical east-end population, and one saw them later in the flare of the naphtha lights, a motley, toil-worn, tired throng, who carried plainly in their faces the impress of their strenuous lives, yet the faces were far more interesting than those further west, where the lines are less deeply graven, and often painstakingly obliterated, and one felt that the east-end was the place to go to if one wished to get at the heart of things.

But we have got some way away from the hospital. It includes beyond the administrative block what are known as the shelters; wards in which patients can be isolated, and watched, if there is any doubt as to their having contracted smallpox. For imagine the feelings of a patient not suffering from smallpox if he found himself isolated on a small-pox ship, and bound to stay there! So every precaution is taken. Cases which are sent down from London are brought by the Asylums' Board Ambulance to the receiving room. From there they are either taken at once on to one of the boats, or taken temporarily into a shelter. Charming places these shelters are: each patient has a separate room, to which there is a lavatory attached, cross ventilation being provided. There are four of these wards in each shelter, side by side; with a kitchen in the middle. The floors are of polished wood, and the walls are panelled up to the ceiling. The effect of the panelled walls is all that can be desired, but one wonders if it is quite wise in a building designed for infectious cases. In the new block, now being got ready, which will be reserved entirely for small-pox cases, the walls are colour-washed. The wards are furnished comfortably and in excellent taste, and coloured table cloths, and touches of scarlet in the shape of turkey twill (what should we do without it?) give just the brightness needed. One could not desire more comfortable quarters, and one can imagine that the occupants of the rooms must wish that they were to be nursed through their illness there, instead of moving on to the ships. But the ships, so says Miss Whitlock, have a fascination of their own. Outside the shelters, on a platform raised well above the ground, and tiled, is a verandah, by means of which the nurse is able to pass from one ward to another. On the other side of this are the linen and other necessary cupboards, so that the nurse has everything to her hand.

At present, when it is decided that a patient is suffering from smallpox, he is usually transferred to the boats. A covered way connects the hospital with these. If only one or two patients are to be taken down to the ships, the little launch, the *White Cross*, which accommodates two patients, is used. She is a charming little boat, and evidently a great favourite with the Matron, who takes a great pride in keeping everything in her department spick and span. As the boats can make the journey up and down to the ships twice during the day, over 200 patients can be taken down, but it is to be hoped that it may be long before this is necessary.

To any one interested in the organization of infectious hospitals a visit to the South Wharf cannot fail to be of extreme interest, and visitors may be sure of a kindly and courteous welcome from the Matron.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)